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Second chance gives stroke survivor ability to help others

Local resident helps State Cardiovascular Health Program recognize, react and recover from stroke.

Fort Belknap – During a scheduled surgical procedure, 63-year-old Melvina Snow lay on the operating table unaware of any physical pain, but totally aware of voices and things being said by the medical staff around her. At one point, she remembers hearing the doctors talking about a stroke.

“All I heard was, ‘It looks like a bleed,’” Snow said. “I don’t remember hearing anything else, but when I woke up, they told me I had suffered a stroke.”

Snow said she noticed some really peculiar things as she began recovering from her surgery. “My left arm just hung there when I tried to put on my robe,” she said. “I also talked funny.”

These strange symptoms were classic signs of having a stroke. Other signs include:

- Loss of vision, speech or understanding
- Trouble walking or dizziness
- Sudden severe headache or confusion
- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body

A neurologist who conducted an MRI on Snow was surprised she wasn’t worse off than she was, because of the

large blood clot she had. While still in the hospital, she began speech therapy and physical therapy to help recover the use of her arm.

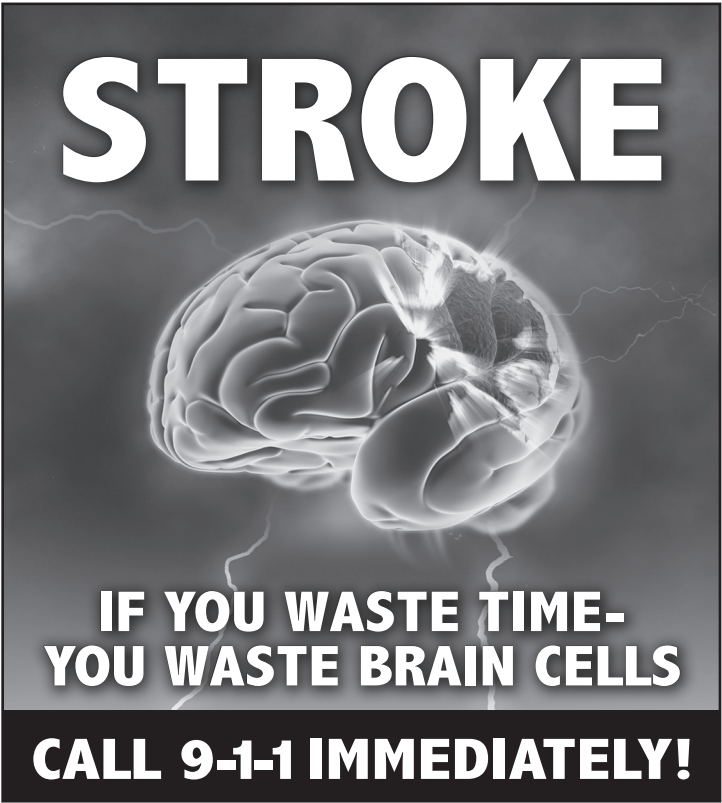
Now 67, Snow still struggles with some of the simple pleasures she used to more easily enjoy. “I like to do puzzles, cross-stitching and other things like that at home,” she said. “Cross-stitching was hard, I had to teach myself again.”

Snow admits it’s also hard for her to commit to a daily exercise routine, but continues to fit in a small work-out at least four times a week. Exercising is important to not only help recover from a stroke, but also to help prevent strokes and other cardiovascular disease. According to strokeassociation.org, physical activity reduces your risk of heart attack and stroke because it helps control your weight and blood pressure, helps you relax and makes your heart stronger.

Snow is an enrolled Tribal Member

of Gros-Ventre/Assiniboine and resides on the Fort Belknap reservation. Recent studies show that American Indians are more likely to suffer from some sort of cardiovascular disease compared to non-Indians. In Montana, a statewide survey of adults conducted by the state Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) showed Indians had a slightly higher

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STROKE

**IF YOU WASTE TIME-
YOU WASTE BRAIN CELLS**

CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY!



**STROKE
STORM
WATCH**

A stroke is a storm in the brain.
Watch for the warning signs and call **9-1-1** immediately.

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prevalence of stroke and acute myocardial infarction (heart attack) compared to White Montanans. Another report found that Montana Indians reported a substantial burden of risk factors (i.e. diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and smoking) associated with cardiovascular disease (stroke and heart attack).

According to a stroke study recently published in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, American Indians had a stroke fatality rate 1.5 times higher than the rates found in other U.S. populations. A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is suddenly interrupted, or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, spilling blood into the spaces surrounding brain cells. Brain cells die when they no longer receive oxygen and nutrients from the blood.

“I am thankful I’ve been given another chance,” said Snow. “I’ve been saved to do something. Perhaps this is my chance to teach my kids to be healthier, to be more aware of their health and to know how to react if they see someone showing signs of a stroke.”

There is treatment available for the most common type of stroke, but treatment must begin within three hours of when symptoms first start. With prompt action, you can help to reduce the risk of severe disability or death. In the event of a stroke, CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY!

It’s not only important to recognize the signs of stroke and take immediate action, but it’s also important to control your risk factors and make lifestyle changes that can help you prevent stroke, or any other cardiovascular disease. Snow is also a diabetic (since 2002), so she knows watching her diet is also important. “I try to be careful in what I eat,” she said. “(Since the stroke), I started changing my eating habits. It’s hard, but I will keep at it and persevere.”

The Montana Cardiovascular Health Program of DPHHS is currently conducting a stroke awareness campaign on the Fort Belknap Reservation to help residents recognize the warning signs and symptoms of stroke.

To learn more about the warning signs of stroke, how you can control your risk factors and available treatments, call 1-888-4STROKE or visit www.strokeassociation.org.

WHAT IS A TIA AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A TIA (transient ischemic attack) is a “warning stroke” or “mini-stroke” that produces stroke-like symptoms but no lasting damage. Recognizing and treating TIAs can reduce your risk of a major stroke. The usual TIA symptoms are the same as those of stroke, only temporary. The short duration of these symptoms and lack of permanent brain injury is the main difference between TIA and stroke. If you or someone you are with experience temporary stroke symptoms, please seek immediate medical assistance. You may be minutes away from a major stroke!

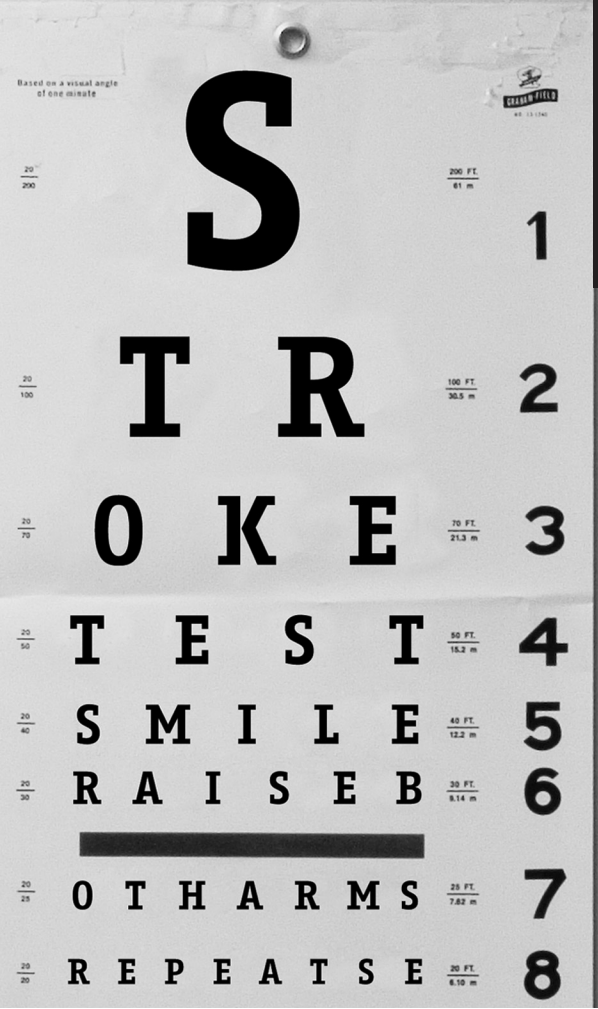
Information provided by the American Stroke Association



REMEMBER THE SIGNS

- Sudden severe headache without a known cause
- Sudden dizziness
- Sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or difficulty understanding
- Sudden difficulty walking
- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side
- Sudden loss of balance or coordination

If you or someone you know experience these symptoms – even if the symptoms appear and then go away – **call 9-1-1 immediately.**
Every minute counts.



REMEMBER THE STROKE TEST

ASK THEM TO SMILE

Stroke sign: one side of the face may not move

ASK THEM TO RAISE BOTH ARMS

Stroke sign: one arm may drift or not move

ASK THEM TO REPEAT A SENTENCE

Stroke sign: the words may be incorrect or slurred

To learn more about stroke, please visit the American Stroke Association at strokeassociation.org or call **1-888-4STROKE.**